



SHAKESPEARE'S *THE RAPE OF LUCRECE*: A COMPLEX MODEL OF HUMAN IDENTITY

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Abstract: It is highly serious and very extremely erotic in tone. The poem starts with the exploration of Tarquin's departure from the Roman camp aimed to seek out and violate Lucrece. Lucrece is projected here as faithful, pure, and helpless to face Tarquin and finally we find that she was paralysed with fear. Lucrece was unknown for her chastity. Her reputation was destroyed by Tarquin. She is afraid that she will be known for her deed. The poem suggests that the rape of Lucrece is the act of a tyrant. Lucrece does not want to live with this stigma. She believes that only death is the solution. Nevertheless, we never excuse Tarquin.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Poem, Rape, Helplessness, Chastity.

The Rape of Lucrece, written in 1594, is narrative poem of Shakespeare. It is highly serious and very extremely erotic in tone. The poem starts with the exploration of Tarquin's departure from the Roman camp aimed to seek out and violate Lucrece.

Lucrece resists with all her strength still she experiences the rape as shameful. Tarquin interrupts her in mid-sentence and gags her with her smock to stop her cry:

*The wolf hath seized his prey, the poor lamb cries,
Till with her own white fleece her voice controlled
Entombs her outcry in her lips' sweet fold.
For with the nightly linen that she wears
He pens her piteous clamours in her head,
Cooling his hot face in the chastest teases
That ever modest eyes with sorrow shed.*

(677-83)

Lucrece is projected here as faithful, pure, and helpless to face Tarquin and finally we find that she was paralysed with fear. Nevertheless, we never excuse Tarquin.

Unable to understand the real purpose of Tarquin, She welcomes him as her husband's friend. Catherine Belsey narrates.

*When she wakes to find him in her bedchamber, she
nonetheless musters every possible argument against
what he intends. But Tarquin, driven by an
imperative he himself hardly understands, is not*

*amenable to reason, and Lucrece is left to bear the
consequences of a crime she did not commit.*

(Belsey 93)

Hence she is ashamed of it. The heinous act of Tarquin has broken her. 'The spots where of could neebing purity, Her tears should drop on them perpetually'. Her body became 'spotted, spoiled, corrupted.' (1172) Lucrece finds helpless. He holds Tarquin and herself responsible for the guilt. Her life is full of the burden of the sin which she committed. She believes that she can restore her integrity only through death by her own hand in the high Roman fashion.

My life's foul deed, my life's fair end shall free it.

(1208)

Lucrece was unknown for her chastity. From the beginning she is called "Lucrece the chaste" (7). She says:

*I was a loyal wife
So am I now one, that cannot be
Of that true type hath Tarquin rifled me.*

(1048-50)

Her reputation was destroyed by Tarquin. She is afraid that she will be known for her deed.

*The nurse to still her child will tell my story,
And fright her crying babe with Tarquin's name.
The orator to deck his oratory
Will couple my reproach to Tarquin's shame,*

*Feast-finding minstrels, tuning my defame,
Will tie the hearers to attend each line,
How Tarquin wronged me, I Collatine.'*

(813-19)

The poem suggests that the rape of Lucrece is the act of a tyrant. Lucrece does not want to live with this stigma. She believes that only death is the solution.

Her decision is her own. (1069-71)

Obviously, her 'offense' was forced. But she is not going to accept it. At her death, the Roman men realize that Lucrece was innocent and pure. The psychological distress of Lucrece is vivid in this poem.

Rape necessarily deconstructs that dualist opposition. Rape differs from common assault to the degree that it involves sexual intrusion and humiliations, with repercussions for both mind and body. Neither purely physiological it breaks taboos and mortifies the victim-nor purely psychological-as physical violence, it is experienced physiologically and can issue in physical consequences-rape calls into questions all comfortable certainties that a clear conscience puts everything right.

(Belsey 97)

After the rape, Tarquin became disgusted:

*'His taste delicious, in digestion souring,
Devours his will that lived by foul devouring'*

(699-700)

The poem demonstrates a complex model of human identity. To free herself from dishonour, Lucrece wants to destroy her polluted body by her own hand.

*For in my death I murder shameful scorn;
My Shame so dead, mine honour is new born*

(1189-90)

The poem explores the story of Lucrece who dominates as a model of propriety in a number of Shakespeare's plays.

Olivia of *Twelfth Night* has Lucrece's image. The image of Tarquin is reflected in *Cymbeline*, *Macbeth*, and *Julius Caesar* as an oppressor and tyrannical. Tarquin uses Lucrece as his property. The appreciation of Collatine evokes Tarquin to attract towards her. Similar to *Macbeth*, he has fear of the

result of his deed. He knows well that his action will bring dishonour to him and his family. Further his coming generation will be ashamed of his deed. But all such feelings give way to "affection"(271) Tarquin observes.

*I have debated even in my soul
What wrong, what shame, what sorrow I shall breed;
But nothing can affection's course control
Or stop the headlong fury of his speed.
I know repentant tears ensue the deed,
Reproach, Disdain, and deadly enmity;
Yet strive I to embrace mine infamy.'*

(498-504)

Obviously, power plays a significant role here. Tarquin is presented as a predator rather than a lover. (342) He is focused as a 'night owl to catch a dove' (360), a 'lurking serpent' (362), and a grim lion fawning over his prey (421). Metaphorically his action is a military. Lucrece is projected as a city in which he enters. His deed leads him towards destruction. His image has been tarnished. A parallel between the private act of Tarquin and the ruthless war conducted by the Tarquin family against Rome's neighbour is vivid here.

The poem suggests that the lawless action of the king breeds lawlessness in subjects. Kings cannot punish offences they themselves commit them.

Hence, king should behave like god (602). The poem focuses on the personal relationship and the politics of the state. Tarquin shows power of silence on Lucrece's arguments as he sexually assaults her. The touching speech and the display of her corpse bring a drastic change in the government of Rome.

In short, we can say that Shakespeare brings his chief stylistic and rhetorical models from Renaissance humanistic writing.

*'Two destines, division none' so that in being both
two and one, Number there in love was slain.*

(Lines 27-8)

Their reciprocal love makes them "either was the other's mine" (line 36) and finally they have been presented as treasurer and treasury. G. Wilson Knight observes that

The phoenix and turtle in Shakespeare's poem 'indicate really not so much persons, as a kind of relationship' through which their difficult, tragic, and yet victorious experience' reveals multi-faceted potentialities of interpretation.

(Night 155)

Summary:

In short, we can say that Shakespeare brings his chief stylistic and rhetorical models from Renaissance humanistic writing. Shakespeare's deepest literary values and his recurrent aesthetic convictions are found in his poems. He explores the problem of identify very brilliantly.

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